

1. The Problems With Understanding Evil

What is the origin of Evil? What types of things become afflicted by Evil? To answer these sorts of questions, we must first define what Evil actually is. What, then, is the nature of Evil? If we can discern the nature of Evil, we can discover where its origins are, what is susceptible to it, and if it has Real Being (i.e. whether or not it is contingent upon other things).

Which faculty of ours can help us discern the nature of Evil? This is not an easy question to answer. We generally understand the nature of different things by abstracting their characteristics to a broader concept (i.e. an Ideal Form or Intellectual Principle). Yet how can there be an Ideal Form of Evil? After all, we have previously discerned that the realm of Ideal Forms, the Intellectual Realm of Nous, contains Good but no Evil. (see notes on Ennead One, Seventh Tractate, Section 3). Does not Evil imply the exact opposite (i.e. the absence of Good and the presence of Evil)? The Soul is able to know the Ideal Forms because they are of the same quality as it is. Since Evil is not of the same quality as Soul, what medium can be used by the Soul to reach an understanding of Evil?

We have previously determined that Good and Evil can be discerned using the same methods (see notes on Ennead One, Sixth Tractate, Section Six). As a result, it stands to reason that knowing about the nature of Good will also allow someone to have knowledge of Evil as well. Consequently, we can make progress on understanding the nature of Evil via inquiry into the nature of Good. Since Good is by definition more primordial than Evil (and everything else at that), we are able to start our inquiry into Good without needing to inquire about any contingent prerequisites (see notes on Ennead One, Seventh Tractate, Section 2).

We can already see the beginnings of some facts about Good and Evil. Good and Evil must exist in some relationship to one another. Good must be a principle with Real Being, while Evil is a privation of it, contingent upon it for existence (i.e. not a Real Being). These relationships will be discussed further in future sections.

2. The Ontological Hierarchy of The Good

Now we must discuss the nature of Good, at least to the degree which is necessary for the current inquiry on Evil. As discussed in earlier tractates, all things participate in Ideal Forms. Via participation in Ideal Forms, things complete their natural functions (judged by how fully they participate in their Ideal Forms) and consequently realize their own individual Good. All things have natural functions they should be attempting to fulfil. Consequently, all things have the potential to fulfil natural functions. Thus, everything which Exists participates in The Good, at least transitively. The Good then unifies all things which Exist together. This is because the existence of a natural function implies a possibility for the realization of an individual thing's Good. Since the Good for any thing is for it to fulfil its natural function, every thing which exists has a potential to achieve its own individual Good. Since everything possess at least the potential for Good, then, it follows that everything in the cosmos is logically contingent upon an overarching principle of The Good to participate in (or not). Since everything participates (to some degree or another, even if only in terms of potential) in this overarching Good, it must therefore be completely self-sufficient. After all, there can be no concept ontologically above The Good. Any concept above it would simultaneously be contingent upon The Good, but also a necessary prerequisite for it (given the fact that all things participate in The Good, if only

potentially). Of course, to be both a prerequisite for something and also contingent upon it is an absurdity (see notes on Ennead One, Seventh Tractate). If all things are contingent upon The Good, it follows that the principle of Existence, the principle of all things Intellectual (i.e. Nous), all acts of Intellectual reasoning, Soul, and Life itself are also contingent on it.

Beauty is defined as participation in the Intellectual (see notes on Ennead One, Sixth Tractate, Section 6). Then even Beauty is ontologically beneath The Good. The Good is then, in a sense, above and beyond Beauty. It is above and beyond pure Intellect (i.e. Nous). Pure Intellect is in turn above and beyond that which we refer to as the Intellectual part of the Human Soul (i.e. the Intellectual Soul), which is only able to reach a small part of the Intellectual realm via extensive use of discursive reasoning (i.e. the Reasoning Soul), and only after much training and effort to parse out the raw sensory experiences we receive (i.e. the Unreasoning Soul).

The Principle of Intelligence (i.e. Nous) has no need for experience or deduction. It is already full and inclusive of all things Intellectual. On the contrary, Human Beings begin with nothing and must work their way up to the Intellectual. The Intellectual does not possess all Intellectual things (i.e. Ideal Forms) in the connotative sense. Rather, each Intellectual thing is a part of the Intellectual itself. Each Ideal Form is then not separated from any other Ideal Form. They are all merely subsections, variant manifestations of the principle of the Intellectual. Put another way, Ideal Forms are distinct within, not from the Intellectual. Just as our hands and feet are distinctions within, not apart from our bodies.

The Intellectual is the first emanation from The Good. As a result, the Intellectual makes up the medium or substance which all other things further down the line of emanation consist in and are dependent upon. After all, everything beneath The Good and the principle of the Intellectual (i.e. Nous, The Ideal Form of Ideal Forms, or the Intellectual Principle of Intellectual Principles) participates in various Ideal Forms and are thus contingent upon them in the same way that everything is contingent upon The Good.

The Intellectual then emanates the All Soul. The nature of Soul is to contemplate and participate in individual Ideal Forms (as opposed to the entirety of Nous itself). As such, a Soul does not encapsulate all Ideal Forms. It must abstract the nature of Nous via the individual Ideal Forms which make up Nous. Soul is then contingent upon Nous, in the same way the Nous is contingent upon The Good. Consequently, the Soul may only get a glimpse at The Good transitively via Nous.

If we stop our descent here, and only consider The Good, Nous, and Soul, we find a blissful collection. Here reside the Divine beings. This is the realm of the Gods. Evil is not yet present. From here, we can see that there are three categories which are purely Good. Good of the Soul, Good of the Intellectual, and The Good itself. All Good is derived from The Good itself. The Intellectual Good is derived from the principle of Intellection, or the Essence of the Intellectual (i.e. Nous). Good of the Soul, in turn, is derived from the principle of Soul (i.e. the All Soul).

3. The Nature of Evil

If the cosmos were limited to Intellectual Beings and that which is above and beyond them, there would be no Evil at all. After all, these are all among the three categories of Good as defined in the previous section. This is the realm of the Real Beings. Since Evil does not exist there, then it follows that Evil, if it exists in any sense at all, must reside in the realm of the Non

Real Beings (i.e. things which are contingent upon the Real Beings). It must either reside with Non Real Beings, mingle with them, or be a modality that Non Real Beings can engage in.

This term Non Real Beings, sometimes referred to as Non-Being, can be confusing. It is not meant to imply that something does not exist in any way shape or form at all. Non Real Beings can be referred to connotatively. This type of non-reality is also different from perception based illusions, such as the appearance of rest or motion is something when in fact the opposite is true. Rather, the relationship between Real Beings and Non Real Beings is like that of light sources and shadows. It is a matter of contingency, or being self contained. A light source is not contingent upon a shadow for its existence. Plenty of light sources exist without shadows when they are not currently producing light. Yet there are no shadows which exist without a light source providing light (and further some object obstructing the light). Shadows are like Non Real Beings. We can speak of them, and even refer to particular shadows, but they are not real things in of themselves. They are always contingent upon other things.

Many things are Non Real Beings in actuality. All objects of our sense perceptions are Non Real Beings, relying on our particular sensory faculties and our brain to interpret them. What we see, smell, and hear are merely representations which our faculties generate for us. All of these things are posterior to and contingent upon many other things, which is ultimately the hallmark of Non Real Being.

Since Evil cannot reside in the Realm of Real Beings, it must reside (or be in some way affiliated with) the realm of Non Real Beings. Since Non Real Beings are defined as not having a self contained existence, we can see that Evil must be intrinsic to this lack of self contained existence. Evil then is this state of being which has no properties of its own. It is always relying on something else for its defining features. Just as the shape and size of a shadow are not properties of the shadow, but rather consequences of the properties of the light source and the object obstructing it. The shadow relies on the object obstructing the light source for its shape. It depends on the angle at which the light source is relative to the obstructing object for its location. It relies on the brightness of the light source and the opacity of the obstructing object for its particular shade. The shadow has none of these things in of itself. As such, things are not Evil essentially, but rather are Evil via their lack of properties of their own.

What then is the substance of Evil? Since things can become Evil without being essentially Evil, Evil must exist in some manner outside of the things which become Evil. After all, The Good must exist outside of any particular Good which some individual thing may possess. How, then, can we have something like a property of not having any properties?

Some might object and argue that there can be no such thing. What can be said about a lack of having properties apart from a specific thing which lacks properties? Yet we have no issues talking about properties themselves without reference to something which has that property. For example, we can speak of Justice and Temperance without reference to a Just and Tempered person. Consequently, we can speak about lacking properties without needing reference to something which lacks properties.

The solution is that there can be a principle of lacking properties. Normal principles (i.e. Ideal Forms) are full, encompassing all possible manifestations of something. This principle of formlessness, as it were, is then the opposite. It is perfectly lacking in any essences or properties

of its own. It is infinitely formless and empty of defined traits. This is the principle of Evil. Things, then, become Evil via their likeness to this principle. Things become Evil by lacking defined properties of their own.

4. Evil of the Soul

It is the nature of Material bodies to be Evil. Since they have at least some semblance of form (usually shape if nothing else), they are not primordial Evil itself. Their individual Evils are then secondary, contingent upon and resulting from their resemblance to the previously defined primordial principle of Evil. Yet the form of a Material body is always extremely limited, at best resembling just one variant manifestation of category of a shape, and usually the resemblance is poor due to many deformities, cracks, and missing pieces. Has anyone ever seen a physically perfect Tringle (even down to the microscopic level)? Far from anything eternal, material bodies naturally reshape, decay and break apart in the course of their very existence and interaction with other material bodies. Without a Soul, they are Lifeless, and cannot even strive towards the Good.

As such, when a Soul couples with a Material body, it is introduced to such Evils. Such a coupled body becomes an impediment to the natural goals of the Soul. Yet the Ideal Form of Souls is not Evil, and neither are Individual Souls. Then what can we say about Evils of the Soul?

According to Plato, an Evil Soul is enslaved to its Material body. Of the parts of the Soul (see notes on Ennead One, First Tractate, Section 1), it is the Unreasoning Soul which is naturally prone to Evil. Lacking any capacity for reason, it uncritically accepts the information it receives via the senses and emotions. Using its own sensations and feelings, it passes judgment on the Good or Evil of other things based purely on how immediately gratifying or difficult they are. Such an unreasoned process readily gives rise to illusions. It causes things which are Good, but difficult, to appear as Evil. It causes things which are Evil, but pleasurable to the senses and emotions, to appear as Good.

What gives rise to Evil of the Soul?

First of all, a Soul only gains sense perceptions and emotions via its coupling with a Material body (see notes on Ennead One, First Tractate, Section 7). By coupling with a body, the Soul necessarily becomes coupled with aspects of Evil. Since Evil implies a lack of self contained existence, this coupling of Soul and Body necessarily degrades the Soul and weakens its ties to the self contained existence of things Divine. This degradation ultimately manifests as diminished capabilities. The passions and desires of the body weaken the Soul's ability to reason (i.e. the Reasoning Soul). The body distracts the Soul and compels it towards material considerations of hunger, lust, and greed. Further, such bodily compulsions incline the Soul towards temporal and particular circumstances. In doing so, the Soul loses its ability to perceive the Ideal Forms and Essences. Thus, even the Intellectual Soul is weakened in the coupling of Soul and Matter. Who has time to contemplate the nature of Triangles when driven to fashion a single triangular spear point? In general, the Evil of the material penetrates into things which are foreign to it and occupies their focus.

The purified Soul is then defined by the opposite. Not distracted by material passions and desires, it is able to think clearly and reason accurately. It is focused on the Ideal Forms and

concepts, granting it the ability to behave appropriately in spite of the particular circumstances that the body finds itself in.

The Evil Soul turns away from the Divine. By identifying with imperfect Material things, it loses its perfection. By losing sight of its Essence, it becomes but a shadow to its Eternal self. The Evil Soul slowly loses all of its properties. It is defined by the Non Real Beings, the contingent variant manifestations which define its Material body. The truly Evil Soul sees itself as merely a Material body.

5. Evil Is Not Inherent to the Soul

If Evil of the Soul is then a lack of Good within the Soul, does it follow that Evil is a natural property of the Soul? After all, every single Soul is lacking of The Good in some way shape or form. Only The Good itself is fully Good. If this were true, it would also follow that Evil has its seat above and beyond the realm of Matter.

In short, no. The confusion here arises from the notion that Evil is merely any lack of Good in the Soul. Rather, Evil is an absolute lacking of Good. A Soul which is in some way lacking of the totality of The Good still may possess its own individual Good via the completion of its natural function.

Matter, on the other hand, is completely lacking in Good. It has nothing of its own. It has no natural shape, it has no natural properties, and it has no natural functions. Everything which can be said of Matter is always contingent upon something higher. Its features are always a reflection of its current accidental form, and not something inherent to it. It is this lack of inherent properties that prevent it from having even an individual Good. What could the natural function of something which has no properties even be? This is what it means to be a Non Real Being. True Evil is then this complete lack of anything inherent.

To lack some Good is to merely be deficient. Put another way, to lack some Good is to be not Good. True Evil requires a complete lack of any Good, even in terms of potential. Yet to lack some Good, or to be not Good, does entail some presence of an Evil or lack of properties. The more something lacks Good, the more readily it loses the remaining Good it has. Though such a lack of Good may not be Pure Evil, it is certainly on the path towards Pure Evil.

Principle Evil is thus not any particular thing we might refer to as Evil. It is not any particular injustice, vice, or negative characteristic. Evil is a principle distinct from any of its variant manifestations. These instances of individual Evils have some semblance of their own properties at least. After all, we can differentiate and categorize particular instances of Evil. For example, with regard to particular Evils of the Soul, we can identify the particular matter which the Soul has coupled with, which parts of the Soul are afflicted, or by the bodily faculties which are involved.

What can be said of things which are external to the Soul, but also commonly referred to as Evil? What can be said, for example, of poverty and sickness?

Both poverty and sickness are always related to Matter in some way. Sickness refers to a disordered body. The body either lacks nutrition, contains germs or poisons in excess of what it can tolerate, or its constituent parts are not arranged according to their proper form. Poverty

implies a lack of what someone needs. Yet these are the needs of the Material body, such as food, water, and shelter. To the degree which sickness and poverty afflict us, they do so by means of the Material body we are coupled to.

Given this, we can see then that Evil is not something inherent to us, but rather is something external and outside of us. Such Evil has been present before we came into Existence. It afflicts us against our will and best interests. Those who are tenacious and Wise seek deliverance from this Evil, but not all people have the strength to achieve it.

Evil is not an inherent property of Human Beings. Like the Sun and Stars (i.e. the sensible Gods which are both material and free from Evil), some people are able to exist in their Material bodies and overcome their wickedness. Some people are born with such a low drive for the material pleasures that there is hardly any vice for them to overcome in the first place. In all cases, such self mastery is achieved via the parts of the Human Soul which are not bound up in Matter.

6. The Incommensurability of Good and Evil

Given our discussion this far, how can we account for Plato's teachings that Evil cannot ever be completely destroyed, and that Evil exists (in a manner of speaking) out of necessity? Further, why is it that Evil has no place within the Divine, but is ever-present in the mortal realm of Material things?

Does Plato mean to say that the Divine is completely without Evil, existing purely? Don't the motions of the Sun and Stars exist perfectly, go about their motions and existence according to their purpose, and never partake of any injustice, disorder, or wrongs of any kind? Evil things are reserved for the mortal realm of the Material, down here on Earth. When Plato beckons us to flee the Material, is it this Earthly material realm we must flee from?

When Plato speaks of fleeing from the Material realm, he does not mean that we are supposed to somehow remove ourselves from Earth. We need not flee from some physical location. Rather, we are supposed to flee from Evil no matter where we are. We are supposed to be Virtuous, even in our physical bodies. We do so by exemplifying Justice, Piety, and Wisdom. The Vices of the body are the Evils of this realm which we are supposed to flee from. To a dissenter within the Platonic Dialogs who argues that Evil can be destroyed if all of humanity were persuaded to Virtue, Socrates would reply that this is impossible. Good and Evil are absolute contraries, and exist in relationship to one another. If there is Good, then there necessarily is Evil as its contrary.

If vice in Human Beings constitutes Evil in Human Beings, how can we account for the notion that Evil is the contrary of Good? After all, the actions and dispositions of Human Beings cannot be the literal contrary of The Good. The misconception here is the mistaken notion that Vice and Good are contraries, which is not the case. Vice is the contrary of Virtue. Vice and Virtue are not Principle Good or Principle Evil. Rather, they are the variant manifestations of Good and Evil which exist in as contraries within Human Beings.

How can there be a contrary to The Good itself, which is beyond Being and has no peers of the same quality? Further, just because two things are contraries to each other, does the presence of one really necessitate the presence of another? For example, given that the state of being

healthy exists, there is a contrary state of being unhealthy which exists. It is technically possible for everyone to be healthy and for no one to be unhealthy in actuality. While quite unlikely, there is no inherent contradiction or absurdity in such a situation.

For one, Plato does not necessarily argue that for every single set of contrary things, they must both exist and be present. He does, however, argue that this is the case for The Good and Principle Evil. This at least avoids any contradictions when examples such as health and unhealth arise.

We are still left with our other question. How can there be a contrary to The Good itself? After all, The Good is beyond Being and transcends existence.

It can be seen via induction that some Essences and Ideal Forms cannot have an opposite or contrary. But what about the case for the most Universal Ideal Form? What could be contrary to the Universal Essence of Being (i.e. The Good)? Clearly, it would have to be The Universal Essence of Non Being. This is the Principle of Evil. The Principle of The Good is perfectly complete (encompassing everything which exists). The Principle of Evil is perfectly incomplete (consisting in the principle of having no real existence at all). They are completely opposed in every way on every possible front. Their contrary natures exemplify the greatest possible opposition two contraries may be in. Good and Evil are contrary to the limit. It is also the perfection of their contrariness which defines both of their existences. The nature of The Good naturally defines the negative outline of Evil as it perfectly fills out all Existence.

Other contraries at least share something. Perhaps it is that they are both Ideal Forms, or perhaps both of them are at least partly seated in Real Being. In the case of the Universal Contraries, they are completely incommensurable. Within the The Good we have defined boundaries, definite shapes, and things are of precise measurement. Within Evil, there are no defined boundaries, there are no inherent shapes, and there is no possibility to accurately measure anything inherent. The entirety of The Good is in opposition to the entirety of Evil. Evil's existence is, in a sense, false. Its existence is the lack of any inherent, defined existence. The Good's existence is completely sound and inherent. From this, it can be seen that it is indeed possible to have a contrary to The Good, which is transcendent to all Existence.

The warmth and dryness of Fire and the cool dampness Water could be seen as contraries, except for the fact that both of them are contingent upon Matter. If they could exist incorporeally, they would be Ideal Forms or Essences which are also contraries. The point here is that, for things to be contrary, they need not share any qualities or be of the same type of thing. Rather, the nature of contrary things lies in their incommensurability.

7. The Necessity of Evil

Why is it the case that, since Principle Good Exists, Principle Evil must necessarily Exist as well? It is because the cosmos necessarily contains Matter. The cosmos is necessarily comprised of contraries. So, for the Immaterial to exist, the cosmos must also have its contrary in the Material. The cosmos then is comprised of a blend of both the Immaterial Divinities, and their necessary Material contraries. Plato teaches that what the cosmos receives from the Immaterial Divine are the Goods. The cosmos receives Evils from the primordial, formless Material.

From Plato, we learn that Evil is necessarily a part of the cosmos we reside in. This is due to the

fact that we (and the things around us) are contingent on so many other superior things to ourselves for our own existence. The things that we are comprised of and all the things we interact with in our daily lives are removed from Real Being. They are mixed with Evil as a result. These Evils are necessarily generated as casual chains emanate things which have existences which are contingent on other things. For example, complex mathematics are logically necessitated by the consequences of simple mathematics. Complex mathematics are also ontologically contingent upon more fundamental, simple mathematics. The necessary generation of more complex things which are also contingent upon more primordial things generates additional and increasingly Evil (i.e. contingent) things. In this sense, Evil is a privation of the fullness and Realness of The Good.

We cannot flee from Evil in a physical way. Wherever we physically go, Evil will be present. Instead, we flee from Evil via the purifying Virtues. We purify ourselves by disassociating with our Material bodies. To do so displaces us from Matter. After all, to be embodied is to be bound up with Matter. Plato defines separation from the body as being among the Intellectual. The Intellectual Ideal Forms and Essences of the Divine are immortal, and we may escape from perishing by assimilating to them.

This also illuminates the necessity of Evil. Since The Good is the only thing which is whole, and since there exists other things within The Good, then it follows that these distinct entities cannot be fully Good. Consequently, the further something is removed from The Good, the less inherently defined and whole (i.e Real) it becomes. The less Real something becomes, the more Evil it becomes. If we travel as far away from The Good as is possible, of course we end up at its polar incommensurable, the Principle Evil.

If there is something which is First (The Good), then there are also things after it. Otherwise, how could it be first? If we take the furthest thing possible from the First, we necessarily end up with the Last. This is when the chain of causality ends. This limit of emptiness (as opposed to fullness) is Matter, and it is Evil.

8. The Corrupting Nature of Matter

Many will object to the notion that Matter is the source of Evil in Human Being. They will say that ignorance and desires for Vice are not to be blamed on Matter. Some will say that, even if ignorance and desires for Vice are afflictions of the body, it is only because of the Ideal Forms which the body is participating in. Such detractors will blame Ideal Forms like Heat, Cold, Overabundance (e.g. of poison or germs), and Insufficiency (e.g. of vitamins) for various afflictions. They will argue that it is the state (and consequently form) that the bodily organs are in which produces problems, such as organs being inflamed. They will say that it is the state of certain bodily systems which gives rise to depraved desires, such as lustfulness and gluttony. Ignorance then, would be the consequence of disarrayed sensory organs, the problem being their qualitative state as opposed to their Material nature. In short, they place Evil as a property of the Ideal Forms instead of the Material body.

While this hypotheses (that Evil is of the Ideal Forms) is mistaken, let us permit it for the sake of argument. Consider first that all of the above scenarios are still contingent upon the Matter of the body for their disorder. The Ideal Form of an axe head cannot cut down a tree. It is a Material axe head in the Form of Axe Heads that can chop down a tree. Similarly, only the Material body itself can be physically disordered.

In addition, Ideal Forms coupled with Matter are of a different quality than pure Ideal Forms in of themselves. In the coupling, the newly founded aggregate inherits elements of both Ideal Forms and Matter. As a result, it can do things which neither can by themselves. Consider that the Ideal Form of Fire cannot set anything ablaze. Indeed, no Ideal Form affects the Material world by itself. They only may interact with the Material via the Matter that they are coupled with. The Matter that an Ideal Form couples with then acts as the medium for which an Ideal Form may directly influence Material things. In being this medium for Ideal Forms, Matter corrupts the purity of the Ideal Form that it is participating in. Matter imparts its nature to the coupling. It does not corrupt the purity of an Ideal Form via application of its opposite, such as in the case when Heat cancels out Cold. Rather, it imparts a portion of Non Real Being to the coupling via its natures as something without inherent properties. It imparts a lack of inherent properties to the mixture in opposition to the inherent properties defined by an Ideal Form. It imparts lack of an inherent shape to forms with defined shape. It imparts imperfections to that which is perfect in of itself. Again, who has ever seen a perfect physical Triangle? What Material thing does not break down and degrade? What Material thing cannot be reshaped? When an Ideal Form presents itself in Matter, it becomes restricted by the limitations of Matter. Ideal Forms in Matter are like food, which when digested, is used to produce blood, cells, and organs. They are transformed into something different from what they originally were. It is this very process by which the imperfection and fragility of Matter corrupt the Ideal Forms. This is the case even when speaking of complex systems such as a Human body.

How is it possible that a full and self contained Ideal Form may be corrupted by Matter? Shouldn't the Ideal Form dominate Matter and make it like itself instead of the other way around? This is not possible, because an Ideal Form is only eternal and perfect by itself. By mixing an Ideal Form with anything inferior to it, it is no longer an Ideal Form, but an aggregate of the Ideal Form and (usually) the Matter it is mixed with.

To dominate the Evils of Matter, a Soul must flee from the Material. Unfortunately, the mixture of Soul with Matter (i.e. Life) diminishes a Soul's ability to think clearly, act wisely, and ultimately harmonize with The Good. For some embodied Souls, their corruption is so profound that it is not possible for them to overcome in this lifetime. The introduced Material desires distract them from Wisdom, and they become impotent. This mechanism can be seen within every individual. For example, when we are hungry, our material desire for food is greater and more distracting than when we are satiated. Almost everyone behaves and thinks differently depending on how satisfied (or not) their Material needs and desires are.

To conclude, we can see that Matter is indeed Evil due to its lack of self contained properties. Principle Evil is then the principle of lacking inherent properties (and thus being subject to endless and infinite change). Individual Evils are variant manifestations of this principle, such as Material things degrading and breaking down over time. Vice, is then the individual variant manifestation of Evil in the Soul. It results from the parts of the Soul which can lose their properties (usually via coupling with Matter). Vice is to Evil as Virtue is to Good. One is the secondary variant manifestation, while the other is the essential principle.

9. How We May Know of Evil

How can we gain knowledge of Good and Evil? How can we gain knowledge of Virtue and Vice?

As far as Virtue is concerned, we can come to understand virtue via Dialectics and exercising the Intellectual Soul (see notes on Ennead One, Third Tractate, Section 6). How can we learn about Vice? Using Virtue as a guide, we can understand Vice as that which diverges from Virtue. Much like how using a ruler we can discern where a crooked line diverges from a straight path.

Can we gain Intellectual understanding of Vice in of itself?

Vice surely cannot be known Intellectually. Given that it is Evil, and thus incommensurate with Essences and inherent properties, there is by definition nothing concretely Intellectual about it to grasp with the Intellectual Soul. We may then only come to know it via apophatic negation. Put another way, we may only come to see its negative outline wherever Virtue is missing. As for things which are only partially corrupted by a particular Vice, we can come to know about its Evil by the proportion of it which is lacking in Virtue. If we can ascertain the Virtue which is partially present, and recognize which parts of it are missing, we can then identify the Vice by subtracting the parts of the Virtue which are present from the whole Virtue itself. What is left over can only be Vice. It is just the same as how Ugliness can be discovered via identification of the parts of something Ugly which fail to fully participate in their respective Ideal Form (see Notes on Ennead One, Sixth Tractate, Section 6).

How can we identify Evil, which is completely incommensurate with Ideal Form in every way?

In the case of Evil, we cannot merely identify the Ideal Form partially present for apophatic negation, as there isn't any to be found. We must then, negate all Ideal Forms and inherent properties of any kind to come to any knowledge of Evil. That which has no inherent properties and participates in no Ideal Forms we refer to as Matter. This method of knowing things by what they are not (apophaticism) is the only way to come to any knowledge of that which cannot be grasped by the Intellectual Soul. For example, an eye must remove all light from its vision in order to experience darkness. The eye cannot be said to see darkness by definition, as light is required for sight, and darkness necessarily is devoid of light. Yet even though the eye does not see the darkness, it experiences it via the direct experience of an absence of light. In this way, an Intellectual Soul may experience Evil. Not by grasping it via the Ideal Forms, which are necessarily not present in Evil. Rather, by direct experience of the absence of Ideal Form. It is this way which something may experience something else which is completely contrary to itself.

10. The Inherent Evil of Matter

How can Matter be evil if it has no properties of its own? Without properties, what is the Evil to be ascribed to?

Matter is said to be a Non Real Being only in so far as it has no inherent properties of its own. It can be on any shape, size, color, temperature, form, and so on. This does not mean that there is nothing that can be said about Matter. Matter may still assume qualities circumstantially, even though they are not inherent to it. For example, a particular piece of Matter may happen to be in a particular shape at a moment in time, even if this shape is not inherent to it.

Such attributes of Matter can be referred to as accidental qualities, since they only ever happen to be the state that Matter is in (as opposed to being necessitated Essentially). These accidental qualities are then reflections of something with more Real Being, namely an Ideal Form. Matter then does not have inherent qualities, but happens to reflect the qualities of whatever form it is

in at the time. For example, a particular piece of metal formed into the shape of an axe head only happens to be in the shape of an axe head. It could have been forged into a sword, a nail, a sculpture, or any other shape. The real qualities of an axe head, such as having a wide cutting edge, then belong to the Ideal Form itself and not the Matter which merely happens to resemble it. Because this piece of metal could have been any other shape, it is not accurate to say that its shape reflects inherent properties of it. This is the case for all of Matter. Everything which can be said about Matter is merely accidental. The Matter could have initially been formed in different ways, and can be formed into something different later on. It only just so happens to be in the particular state that it is in at any given point in time. Any particular state Matter finds itself in is never necessitated by any kind of Essence.

So, Matter is not Evil because of some particular state that it is in. Rather, Matter is Evil by definition because it has no inherent state of Being of its own. If there were inherent properties of Matter, it would not be Evil. Matter would be able to fulfil its natural function, consistent with its nature, if it had anything inherent to it (which would be a Good). Rather, Matter can never have a Good because it is contrary to the concept of having properties. It never has a natural function to fulfil, as there is nothing about it which is Essential.

11. Evil Cannot Belong to a Soul

Some may object and argue that to be contrary to having inherent properties (i.e. contrary to Ideal Form) is merely a privation (i.e. lack) of form. If Evil is merely a lack of Good, a privation of Ideal Form, can it be said to have any existence in of itself? After all, a privation is always relative to something else. For example, the concept of a lack of water requires a concept of water for it to make any sense. Otherwise, what exactly would be lacking?

Let us answer this by looking at the case Evil of the Soul. Evil of the Soul (i.e. Vice) is a privation within the Soul, and not something external to the Soul. Evil of the Soul needs no external self existence to be coherent. We can refer to it without issue. Consequently, Principle Evil can also be referred to even if it has no Real Being of its own to refer to.

Similar arguments may be used to deny Matter altogether, or at least deny that Matter is Evil if the argument allows it to exist. On these sorts of views, Evil then has its seat in the Soul as a property.

Let us take this line of thinking to its logical conclusion. Evil in something is the privation of Good in that thing. If Evil of the Soul exists within the Soul itself, then the Soul would lack Good by definition. After all, Evil is a privation of Good. Yet the natural function of the Soul is to Unite with the Good, and its characteristic act is to direct itself towards the Good (see notes on Ennead One, Seventh Tractate, Section 1). If there is a privation of Good within a Soul, then an Evil Soul will be fundamentally contrary to its natural function and characteristic acts. Asserting that there is a privation of Good within a Soul is then an inherent contradiction. This would annihilate the concept of the Soul as a consequence of the fundamental nature of what a Soul is, and what Evil is.

In fact the Soul by fundamentally has much Good in it. Every Soul has ties to the Ideal All Soul. Every Soul engages in its variant Good as a natural consequence of its characteristic acts. It therefore cannot have Evil as a part of its Essence.

12. Principle Evil Cannot Be an Accident of Something Else

What if someone retorts, and argues that Evil of the Soul is not a complete privation of Good, but rather a partial privation of Good? If Evil of the Soul is only a partial privation of Good, then it follows that the Soul possesses both Good and Evil mixed together. Since the Soul would then possess both Good and Evil in part, neither would be their principle form. Both Good and Evil of the Soul would necessarily be accidental to the Soul, and Evil itself would have to be something external to it. For example, could the principle of Coldness be found in something which is also sometimes Hot? No, since Principle Coldness is completely contrary to Principle Hotness. Since Evil of the Soul then reflects a Principle Evil external to it, it cannot be the case that Evil within a Soul is merely a relative privation of Good.

13. Evil Is Not Merely an Impediment

Another hypothesis is that Evil exists as an impediment to the Soul. Evil would then relate to the Soul in the same way that an obstruction in line of sight relates to vision.

Once again, this type of Evil is merely accidental. An obstruction to a line of sight is accidental to vision. Vision certainly does not require any obstructions as a prerequisite. A Soul likewise does not require any sort of obstruction as a prerequisite for it. This definition of Evil is thus insufficient to explain Principle Evil. Just as Virtues of the Soul are not The Good themselves, but rather variant manifestations of it, so too are Vices of the Soul (i.e. Impediments within the Soul) not Principle Evil itself, but variant manifestations of it.

Virtue is not The Good. The Good is, of course, antecedent and transcendent to Virtue. Virtue is Good and Beautiful via participation in The Good, not because it is The Good itself. So, transcendent above Virtue is The Good. Being contrary to The Good, the nature of Evil is the opposite. So, corrupted and descendent below Vice is Principle Evil. Understanding the partial formlessness of Vice then lends understanding (to the degree which is possible) about the perfect formlessness of Evil. We become corrupted by Evil to the degree we participate in Principle Evil. By our corruption, we reside in the unrecognizable, lacking resemblance to the Divine. If the Soul falls completely into Vice, it is transformed into something alien to itself. A Soul with both Vice and Virtue is still Human, with at least some ties left to The Good. Lacking any Virtue at all, the Soul dies as much as is possible for a Soul. It becomes enshrined in formless Matter, taking on a Material nature. Upon separation from the body, it lies asleep face down in Hades. It may only recover when it turns to face The Good once more.

14. The Descent of the Soul into Matter

Another alternative hypothesis with regards to Vice is that Vice is weakness in the soul. Proponents of this will say that the Soul full of Vice is unstable. The weak Soul is quick to anger, and equally quick to compromise its own principles. Such a Soul may quickly be directed in negative directions by the desires, appetites, and ignorance which are part and parcel to the body.

What, on this account, does weakness of the Soul consist in? Why do Souls become weak? After all, the weakness specified above are all afflictions of the body. Weakness of a body entails an inability for the body to complete various tasks or resist harm. A weak body may not be able to lift something heavy, or it may become sick very easily. We might apply this concept analogously to the Soul in some way, but if the weakness is of the Soul itself then it must not refer to the body. Weakness of the Soul must be self-contained within the Soul itself. To investigate this. Let

us consider the potential causes of Weakness of the soul.

Weakness in a soul cannot be perfectly analogous to weakness in a body. Weakness in a body might be due to insufficient muscle mass, lack of stoutness of frame, or perhaps a compromised immune system. Weakness in a Soul would then have to be in one of three locations.

- a. In the Soul alone, separate from matter.
- b. In the Soul while coupled with matter.
- c. In both the Soul alone and in the Soul coupled with matter (i.e. both a. and b.)

If we consider option a., we realize that this is impossible. Souls separate from matter are Good, and pure. They fulfil their natural functions automatically with their every act. Ruling out a., of course, rules out both a. and b. together. So, we are only left with option b. The Weakness of the Soul then must have its seat in a Soul which is coupled to Matter. The Soul coupled with Matter is weak because it has fallen from its state of purity. The Soul coupled with matter is weak because the Matter has a parasitic effect on the Soul. This implies that the Weakness in the Soul is not a sort of privation. Rather, weakness in the Soul has a substantial presence, like that of a parasite in a host.

Let us further discuss the fall of the Soul so that we can illuminate its weakness. Soul and Matter when coupled occupy the same space, so to speak. It is not the case, for example, that Matter is on Earth while Souls are above it in the air. A Soul separated from all Matter is not physically anywhere. A Soul separated from matter may not affect Matter via forming it in a particular manner. If there is a separation between a Soul and Matter, that separation is complete.

The Soul contains several abilities correlated with its different parts. It has its first part, the Intellectual Soul capable of abstract thinking. It also has its middle part, the Reasoning Soul capable of discursive reasoning. Finally, it has its last part, the Unreasoning Soul which can experience sensory perceptions. Matter attempts to enter the Soul, like a beggar trying to enter a palace. Yet each part of the Soul is pure and has Realness (as they are each within Soul). Matter, having no inherent properties of its own, is unable to enter Soul. Instead, Soul imparts form onto Matter. Yet despite however hard the Soul tries, and how much form the Soul imparts on Matter, the inherent transient nature of Matter cannot be negated. The Matter inevitably degrades, shifts shape, and loses whatever form was imparted to it. In turn, this formed Matter, a mixture of Soul and Matter, dilutes the Realness of Soul in this combination. Matter necessitates that this form of this mixture is impermanent and inevitably temporary.

Why would a Soul ever seek out Matter? The Soul seeks Matter as a means to impart form into something. This process allows a Soul to generate Life by animating a Material body. Yet in this process, the Soul becomes mixed with Matter and descends. This mixture loses the eternal nature of the Soul. Losing the perfection of its inherent properties, the Soul is weakened in this mixture. The Soul meets impermanence until it can separate from the Matter it is coupled with. In this process, the parts of the soul become weak and imperfect at thinking abstractly, reasoning discursively, and even sensing.

So it is Matter which ultimately causes Weakness, the resulting Vice, and the consequent Evil of the Soul. Because Evil of the Soul is accidental to the Soul, Evil must exist apart from the Soul and prior to the mixture of Soul and Matter. When the Soul seeks out Matter as a means to

create Life, this creation of life is Essentially mixed with Evil. Matter is necessary for a coupling of Soul and Matter (i.e. Life). Yet Matter is fundamentally Evil. Thus, with the creation of Life comes the Evils of Life, such as suffering.

15. Descent into Matter and Return to The Good

Those who claim that Matter as defined here does not exist will require a further in depth exposition on Matter in another text.

Those who deny that a Principle of Evil exists, also implicitly deny that The Good exists. How could The Good exist without necessarily implying that which it is not? Such a presupposition denies the possibility of desiring something Good and avoidance of something Evil. It is to deny all Intellectual activity. After all, Intellectual acts direct thought towards Wisdom, which is towards Good and away from Evil. This is why it is said that Wisdom is a Good thing.

There must be a pure Good, pure Evil, and things which are both partly Good and partly Evil. Good and Evil exist on a continuum and are always in perfect proportion. Things may thus be 100% Good (i.e. The Good), 100% Evil (i.e. Principle Evil), or part Good and Part Evil with both parts summing in 100% (e.g. 50% Good, 50% Evil, or 32% Good, 68% Evil, etc.).

What then, is Evil of the Soul?

Since the Soul is perfectly eternal, its Evil must consist in mixture with that which is impermanent and lacking self contained properties. The Soul being perfect and eternal, lacks nothing. Without a lack, how could a Soul experience desire? Without impermanence, how could a Soul experience fear of destruction, actual destruction, and the resulting pain and sorrow? How could a perfect Soul be wrong, and experience ignorance and illusion? The Soul may only experience these imperfections by mixing with something foreign to it which is imperfect. This mixture provides the Soul with experiences of impermanence and imperfection.

This substance which degrades the Soul is Matter. It tempts the Soul with promises of creation. Through ensouling Matter, the Soul may create Life. Such acts may appear as Good. Even something which is 99% Evil has 1% Good in it. The Good pierces through (even if only a little) to all but Principle Evil. Yet this temptation is like a set of golden chains, alluring but ultimately a trap. Even the Gods may miss the Evil in something when distracted by its Good. On the other hand, even Material Human Beings are not forced to experience Evil alone. They may experience Good as well. The Human Soul may seek Unification with the Divine via the Intellectual. This is the pathway to The Good, and the natural desire of the Soul. By seeing the Beauty in all things, we may remember The Good which we are a part of and direct ourselves back towards it.